Title:'The hills are alive': ethno-regionalism & contemporary Indian Nepali writings

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Synopsis

In this thesis I would like to explore multi-facets of the writings of contemporary Indian Nepali writers, who write both in English and in Nepali, in relation to Gorkha ethno-regionalism.In case of Nepali texts I shall primarily use those which have been translated into English; in some cases I shall also translate sections to prove my point. At this stage I would like to think that 'identity' is an obvious concern of my field of inquiry but I would not like to limit my research possibility only to the aspect; indeed, I would like to keep the field of inquiry open at this stage, especially since this is largely an uncharted area.

The issue of ethno-regionalism in this context involves thedemands made for a separate state of Gorkhaland by and for the Nepali-speaking population of the Darjeeling Hills, to be carved out from the existing state of West Bengal. Mainstream discourse tends to see this exclusively as a separatist demand that weakens the fabric of an already vulnerable Indian nation. Indeed, the demand originally tabled by Subash Ghisingh for his Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF).A two-year-long violent agitation began in the Darjeeling hills fora new state, where Ghisingh's GNLF fought against the State Government of West Bengal, backed by the Central Government's forces, which opposed the demand for statehood. It eventually ended in 1988 with an agreement to form the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC). This destabilized the peace of the idyllic hills which became alive, not with the music of silence, but with different voices altogether.However, as I will attempt to explore in my research the issue of ethno-regionalism cannot be limited to mere political demands for self-governance, a binary of regional versus national but involves multiple belongings and affiliations.Thus, there is no simplistic formulation of a single monolithic 'Gorkha' identity in the writings.

It may be pertinent to point out that Indian -Nepali writingis at best a marginal presence in what constitutes the official or mainstream 'postcolonial Indian' writing. In my thesis I would like to address these lacunae. I would like to begin by giving a brief account of the primary texts that I will work with. This will also establish my hypothesis that this contemporary writing challenges the ethnic bias in reducing the Gorkhas to one monolithic representational stereotype viz. the militant warring tribes who found gainful employment in the British army as soldiers or as security personnel or the *darwan,* which has been created and perpetuated in mainstream discourses, both during colonial period and after formal decolonization. It is my contention that contemporary Nepali-Indian writing may be regarded as a rich source of counter-hegemonic cultural poetics and politics.

Among the authors the most prominent in terms of his prestige andpopularity is Prajwal Parajuly, an Indian-Nepali diasporic writer, educated in Oxford and settled in the UK. Parajuly's *The Gurkha's Daughter* (2012) is a collection of short stories which have as their common theme the varied experiences of the Nepalese dispersed to Bhutan,India and the US. The characters who people Parajuly's short fictions are ordinary human beings and the plots revolve around what may be identified as constitute 'crisis' in their quotidian existences: thus a disfigured servant girl from the Dooars who plans to flee Nepal, a shopkeeper in Kalimpong who faces the dilemma of confronting a shop lifter, a man in Darjeeling who makes a sacrifice to accommodate his insensitive relatives to his one room house in 'dasain'(dusshera),a Nepali Bhutanese refugee who pins her hopes on settling in the US as an attempt to get away from her deplorable situation at the refugee camp. The collection derives its title from the story of two Nepali girls who are daughters of Gurkha soldiers in the British Army who were separated as their fathers get transferred to the U.K and Brunei respectively. In Parajuly's novel *Land where I Flee*(2013), three siblings travel from New York, Manhattan and London to attend their grandmother, Chitralekha's'*Chaurasi*' (84th birthday) in Gangtok. Agastya the oncologist from New York is gay. He dreads that his reason for remaining single would be discovered by his family;Manasa, the Oxford educatedwoman has spent years now playing the role of anurse, caretaker to her ailing father- in- law. Bhagwati who has recently moved to Manhattan with her family had been ostracized for her elopement with a Nepali-Bhutanese man from a low caste.

Apart from Parajuly's work I would like to include in my thesis Chetan Raj Shrestha's*The King's Harvest*- a compilation of two novellas-'An Open and Shut Case' and 'The King's Harvest.''An open and shut case' as the rather ironic title suggests evokes the genre of a detective fiction; it concerns a young Kamala, who murders her husband Constable Puran and hacks him into forty-seven pieces. She then collects her daughters and goes to the Naya Bazar police station in Sikkim to surrender .DechenO.C a tough and foul mouthed police woman is given charge of the investigation. The second novella 'The King's Harvest' is an enchanting tale ofTontem, a man who is derided by everybody because of his peculiar looks decides to spend his life in a remote and desolate land where there are no obvious markers of development like electricity and roads. The novella has elements of the oral folk-tale and what may be identified as magic –realism.

Indra Bahadur Rai is an author who writes in Nepali. He writes not only fiction and drama, but also pens provocative essays that deal with Nepali. *Gorkhas Imagined*Indra Bahadur Rai in Translation (2009)is a collection of Rai's short stories and essays which have been translated into Englishby Prem Poddar and Anmole Prasad. This is the first book of its kind that powerfully brings out all these issues of Gorkha identity and politics. This anthology is about culture and politics, identity and history, as well as the varied range of human emotions of friendship and enmity.'A Story That Happened'-talks about two lovers from Nepal who elope to 'muglan'(the land of the Mughals/India)' another story 'Jaimaya Alone arrived at Likhapani'-describes the exodus of the Nepalese from Burma during the Japanese invasion of Burma; in 'Maina's Mother Is Just Like Us' the focus is on a woman who is only referred to as Maina's mother and a vegetable seller The story 'The Ordinariness of the Day'-talks about an ordinary day when a couple ,Maya and her husband work together in their fields, 'The Storm raged All Night Long' describes Kaley and his parents' nightmarish experiences as the wind howls and the rain rattles their tin roof house which is in an imminent danger of being washed away by

landslides . In ‘Kheer’ the story writer/narrator overhears daily wage workers putting their heads and hands together to cook a pot of ‘kheer’ for themselves after a hard day’s work.

The fifth book I would like to bring into discussion is *An Anthology Of Nepali Short Stories in English* (1999). The stories in this collection allows us a glimpse into the complexartistry of that contemporary Indian Nepali writings ‘The Third House’ is the story of the utter loneliness of a woman who is abandoned by her husband because she bears no children and whose brother builds her a separate (third) house . In ‘Brightness without Light’ we witness-the suffering and frustration of a father when he learns the bitter truth that his daughter’s blindness cannot be cured. ‘Your Father Has No Money’ is a touching story about a father and a son who leave a bookstore sad and humiliated as the father cannot afford to buy books for his school going son .’Monalisa Of The Twentieth Century’ is the story of a Nepali artist who is compelled to sell his master piece at a trifling price because of his poverty as he longs to meet Sugandha his beloved and also his model in Mumbai only to find her long dead. He too dies on his journey home.’ ‘Where will you take me now?’ is a story about a woman Rupa who is married to a soldier to look after his house and his aged mother. He is a jealous husband who suspects his wife continually; in the end Rupa musters courage to confront her husband and asks him to break their marriage if he cannot trust her.

Apart from fiction and essays I also intend to explore the complex issues of ethnic identity, relationships, community and relation to imagined geographies in the poetry and lyrics of contemporary Indian Nepali poet artists. This I believe will add a different dimension to prose works and allow a fuller understanding of the ethno regional affinities and identity of a community.

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